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Navy Sonar and Marine Mammals

"The Navy will continue to train at sea with MFA sonar to ensure the security of our nation and the safety of our sailors and ships. We will also continue to take every step necessary to safeguard ocean life and to advance the scientific research that will help us make informed decisions."

— Mr. Donald Schregardus Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment)

Importance of Sonar Training

- Forty-one countries, including China, North Korea, and Iran have modern submarines. Of the 380 submarines operated by 41 countries worldwide, more than 300 are extremely quiet diesel-electric submarines.
- It is crucial that U.S. Navy ships and submarines continue training with active sonar in order to protect U.S. national interests and to neutralize the threat of quiet diesel-electric submarines in the littoral.

Responsible Use of Sonar

- The Navy is committed to the continued use of active sonar and goes to great lengths to minimize any potential effects on marine life through the use of protective measures.
- Navy makes every effort to safeguard marine mammals when exercises are conducted. These measures include:
 - Stationing trained lookouts
 - Listening passively for marine mammals
 - Employing night vision and thermal imaging equipment
 - Safety zones around ships
 - Extra precautions during chokepoint exercises
 - Taking appropriate action when marine mammals are spotted
- Ships typically employ active sonar, whether for maintenance or for exercises, less than five percent of the total time they spend underway in a given year.

Marine Mammal Research

- Navy is a world leader in marine mammal research, dedicating over \$14 million in FY06 alone.
- In addition to the significant work being done in sonar-related behavior, researchers working with the Navy's Marine Mammal Program have made significant advances in the care, diagnosis, and treatment of marine mammal diseases.

National Defense Exemption

On 23 Jan 07, SECDEF approved a two-year National Defense Exemption under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) for naval activities involving mid-frequency active (MFA) sonar use during major training exercises and on established ranges and operating areas.

- **From Jan. '07 – Jan. '09, Navy will not be required to seek permits under the MMPA for use of MFA sonar during these exercises.** However, the Navy will seek permits under MMPA for other activities if required. As required by law, SECDEF conferred with the Secretary of Commerce prior to signing the NDE.
- **NDE will cover exercises critical to our national defense.** About 43 sonar exercises are currently scheduled to occur during the next two years. These exercises allow forces to continue to remain proficient in all aspects of war fighting at sea. Anti-submarine warfare using active sonar is an important part of that proficiency.
- **This is the second NDE.** SECDEF approved the first NDE on 30 June 2006 for a period of six months with the requirement that Navy work with the Department of Commerce to address the regulatory authorization process and expedite the analysis and regulatory steps necessary to come into full compliance with the MMPA. This effort continues.
- **The Navy has a long-term environmental compliance plan and continues to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to execute that plan.** The MMPA authorization process for major exercises involving MFA sonar, however, cannot be completed in the short-term. Because ceasing sonar operations would put our country and forces at risk, this NDE serves to cover the Navy in short-term and serves as a bridge to long-term compliance.
- **As required by the NDE, NMFS-approved mitigation measures will be implemented.** The NDE will help Navy continue to conduct the sonar training necessary for our national defense while protecting marine mammals.

"The Navy has worked closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on our long-term compliance strategy, and the National Defense Exemption is an agreed upon part of the strategy. It allows both agencies to apply resources to the long-term plan."

-- RDML James Symonds, Director, Environmental Readiness Division, N45